



THE FUTURE IS MORE
500 YEARS UTOPIA — LEUVEN

PRESS FILE

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YTO BARRADA

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INTRODUCTION

Yto Barrada's (°1971 Paris) new exhibition at M continues her recent work around fossil evidence, palaeontology, museology and natural history in Morocco. As the exhibition tells us, millions of years ago, today's Sahara Desert was a tropical paradise, covered in vegetation, lakes, and a river as wide as the Danube, full of fish ten feet long. Today, the arid space between Morocco's Atlas Mountains and the desert are home to a hardscrabble cottage industry of excavating, preparing, forging, and selling fossils.

The animals that disappeared live on in fossil form. But for the past century, these fossils – from unique enormous dinosaur skeletons, to fake scorpions in heart-shaped rocks – have been leaving Morocco en masse. What happens when a country sees a substantial part of its heritage disappear abroad, and be forgotten at home? The answer of artist Yto Barrada is as refreshingly sobering as it is clear: those who are threatened with losing their past will often simply create a new one.

In the exhibition she has created for M, Barrada touches on themes including the power of imagination, humour, play and creativity, forms of memory, 'authenticity' and tradition. In the artwork here, techniques of imprint and stain, of impression and colour transfer, carry other, more elusive ideas too.

Barrada's work – photographs, films, sculptures, books and installation – refers not only to the interwoven histories of colonialism, tourism, ethnography and the consumer society, but also to various strategies of resistance to these forms of power. Her work itself might be regarded as a form of resistance, and she – like the fossil sellers, smugglers, magicians and false guides who are among her subjects – depends on playfulness, ingenuity and humour as key strategies.

Curators: Stéphane Symons, Hilde Van Gelder, Eva Wittocx

*Exhibition organized by M-Museum Leuven in cooperation with KU Leuven as part of the citywide **Utopia** festival.*

THE ARTIST AS FALSE GUIDE

What is true? It's a question that Yto Barrada attacks from all sides, not only in her deconstruction of so-called 'tradition' and 'authenticity' – two attributes that Orientalist thought ascribed to the Arab world. Her non-judgemental interest in both real fossils and in the work of 'preparators' who cross the line into creating new pieces from the moulds furnished by nature, gives a further insight into Barrada's world view, as do her filmed portraits of incompetent magicians, small-time smugglers, futile gestures and family myths.

Barrada is, perhaps, more interested in the artefacts, histories and stories behind these varied constructions than in their truth-value.

ROOM 15 FOSSILS

Barrada began her exploration of the fossil remains of dinosaurs in North Africa in 2012, when her interest was kindled by the sale of a Moroccan Spinosaurus at a large European auction house. The artist's multidisciplinary research into North Africa's prehistory, rural history, and its contemporary corollaries led to a diverging set of inquiries. One followed the real/fake axis along the Dinosaur Road where today's specimens are unearthed, prepared, brought to market, and sometimes falsified; here questions of artisanry, tourism, science, real versus fake, and economics were called into play. Another inquiry explored the role of ethnographers and museologists working in the region and the way they represented their subjects. Barrada also turned her formidable curiosity on Morocco's relationship with its palaeontological past, and the strange lack of context in schools, museums, and national consciousness, of this unique heritage.

Faux départ

The film ***Faux départ*** (2015) (False Start) observes the elaborate fossil industry along the so-called 'Dinosaur Road'. It pays homage in particular to the 'preparators' in the arid region between the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara Desert, whose intrepid work has fuelled a thriving trade in artefacts real, faux and hybrid. The film is a rebuke to the fetishistic thirst for foreign objects, a sly meditation on authenticity, and a paean to the creativity and enterprise of the préparateurs whose skilful response to demand has resulted in a flourishing trade. The title of the film clearly refers to the forgery of fossils, but arguably also to Morocco's rebirth as an independent nation after the years as a French 'protectorate' and its road to a new identity.

Faux départ won the prize for Best Short film at the Rotterdam International Film Festival in 2016.

ROOM 16: COLLECTING

The series ***Lying Stone Hearts*** (2015) comprises twelve heart-shaped fossils and the accompanying mould, each with two scorpions and a trilobite (a prehistoric arthropod and one of the best-known fossil creatures). In this recent work, created in collaboration with 'preparators' in a remote village at the edge of the Sahara, Barrada reflects on aspects of museum practice, the collecting and display of heritage, and the way exhibited objects acquire a new meaning, separate from their original context.

BERINGER'S LYING STONES

The ***Beringer's Lying Stones Series*** (2014-2015) consists of a group of photographs of fossils presented to the world by Professor Johann Bartholomeus Adam Beringer at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Beringer wrote a book on his finds (*Lithographia Wirceburgensis*, 1726), in which he discussed the divine creation of these fossils, which featured carvings of lizards, frogs, and spiders on their webs and even the name of God in Hebrew. Unfortunately for Beringer, the fossils were actually a practical joke, made by fellow professors who had created and placed the stones themselves on Mount Eibelstadt, where Beringer often went fossil-hunting.

DINOSAUR WOODBLOCK PRINTS (2013)

For this inventory of 'Moroccan' dinosaurs, Barrada collaborated with a Japanese master-printer to bring her drawings – in a children's illustration style – to these limited-edition prints using the time-honoured woodblock technique.

COCA COLA BOTTLES (2015)

Barrada had this iconic silhouette fashioned from fossilised Orthoceras, a mollusc that went extinct around 443 million years ago. Well-known examples of Orthoceras occur in Morocco, Scandinavia, the Alps and Iowa (USA).

ROOM 17: SALON GÉOLOGIQUE (2016)

In the installations in this room, Barrada continues her research into the stratified character of geological time and the visual ways the strata are rendered by scientists. She has been collecting and studying textile, weaving and embroidery techniques – both Moroccan and from elsewhere – for some years now. At the same time, Barrada is interested in the language of modernism and the way the Europe-based modernist movement borrowed from other cultures. Barrada presents individual and collective identity as a palimpsest – a complex whole, in which history and actuality are present simultaneously.

Barrada has created limited-edition carpets inspired by the abstract designs of the Swiss Dada artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp, woven on wooden looms in Tangier by the women of the nonprofit civic women's association Darna. Abstract, geometric forms are likewise found in ***Felt Circus Flooring, Tangier***.

The artist is exhibiting a series of prints of educational panels in this room, explaining the layers of the earth and geological fault-lines, which she found in the Natural History Museum project in Azilal, Morocco. The same stratified layers are present in Barrada's new installation, conceived in collaboration with designer Stephanie Marin's Smarin studio, and titled ***Salon géologique***, in which stacked carpets and pillows – here printed with geological codes – evoke the modular Moroccan family living room. ***Salon géologique*** was conceived in dialogue with the Salon Lyautey – the reception room of General Hubert Lyautey when he was commissioner of the colossal French colonial expo in 1931. Lyautey was France's defining Resident General of Morocco from 1912 to 1925. At the same time, Salon géologique refers obliquely to Marcel Duchamp's *La Boîte-en-valise* ('Box in a Suitcase'), a portable miniature monograph which contains 69 miniature copies of earlier works by the artist.

ROOM 18: THE INVENTION OF TRADITIONS

The etymological root of the word 'tradition' is the Latin tradere, which contains the meaning of both 'surrender' and 'to hand down to posterity';

LYAUTEY UNIT BLOCKS

The bricks in Lyautey Unit Blocks spell out the name of a controversial figure. As Resident General of Morocco, Hubert Lyautey (1854–1934), had plans to resurrect the Moroccan Empire under French protection. In a programme ranging from agriculture and urban planning to the development of carpet crafts, he aimed to reinvent Morocco under the banner of tradition and authenticity. He launched a national project of 'heritage conservation' and planned an inventory and reorganization of artisanal crafts – Morocco's special talent – to stimulate production. In the context of Barrada's work, her sustained interest in Lyautey's legacy speaks volumes about her refusal to surrender to a simplistic notion of colonialism as nothing more than subjugation and exploitation.

The bricks are a colourful allusion not only to Barrada's taste for toys but also to the apartment blocks and hotels that are popping up in Morocco like mushrooms: every bit of unused land is being grabbed by property-developer capitalism, without the slightest interference from neoliberal politics. Lyautey too had grandiose construction plans for Morocco, thereby contributing to the country's nascent tourist industry.

The Maréchal Lyautey Quotes Series includes a quote, from Lyautey, set out in the same blocks: “Lorsque sur une terre lointaine on rencontre 2 anglo saxons ils on déjà formé un trust si ce sont 2 allemands ils ont déjà formé un Verein si ce sont 2 français ils sont brouillés.” (If, in a faraway land, you meet two Anglo-Saxons, you can be sure that they have already formed a legal trust. If they are two Germans, they have already organized a club. If they are French, they have stopped speaking to each other long ago.)

THE POSTER FOR ‘A MODEST PROPOSAL’ (2010-2013)

In the satirical tradition of Jonathan Swift, this proposal is humbly submitted by an anonymous bureaucrat (perhaps also the author of Barrada’s *A Guide to Trees for Governors and Gardeners?*) who makes a radical suggestion for how to remove the last obstacle to progress in Morocco.

PLAY AND TOYS

Yto Barrada’s work is noteworthy for its interest in pedagogy, play, toys and models, and humour as a form of subversion.

The exhibition includes Barrada’s film *A Guide to Trees* (2014) which uses her table-top automated model *Gran Royal Turismo* (2003). Based on a road racing set, it depicts a rather bleak, undefined little city, treeless, with dirty sidewalks and walls. A convoy of three black Mercedes emerges from a tunnel. Just before it arrives, the dirty streets are transformed into gleaming pathways for the VIPs to pass through; palm trees shoot up from the ground to welcome them; the sidewalks and walls flip over to reveal clean, freshly painted surfaces, and flags blossom along the route. As soon as the motorcade has disappeared, everything returns to its original state. The cheerful music and voices of playing children die away again. The whole circuit lasts three minutes.

The palm tree, that icon of exoticism, sagging under the weight of its symbolic duties, also occupies an important place in a number of works by Barrada. Aside from featuring prominently in her early photographic work, and lending its silhouette to Palm Sign, Barrada’s illuminated statues inspired by motel signs, the palm is an important motif in the video *Beau Geste* (2009) – a probably futile gesture of ‘guerrilla gardening’. The film documents a team, recruited by the artist, performing crude repairs on a palm tree that was intentionally damaged by the owner of the vacant lot where it stands.

The North African Toys Series (2014-2015) consists of photographs of Berber toys, handmade for children, from the collection of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. Many were collected during French ethnographic missions in the 1930s. The first stage of Barrada’s

research was to document works from the collection by taking photographs of each individual object, in a deceptively bare, frontal way against a monochrome background. Although they are tiny, this treatment lends them an iconic status.

The installation ***Plumber Assemblage*** (2015) likewise reveals Barrada's penchant for the collection of vernacular objects. These pieces, acquired in the Grand Socco Square of Tangier (home of the 1938 Cinéma Rif, now the Cinémathèque de Tanger, the arthouse and cultural centre founded by the artist ten years ago) are skilfully wrought bricolages made from various plumbing elements including pipes, faucets and spigots, used by out-of-work plumbers to signal their availability for hire. As with the fake fossils, Barrada's work offers a glimpse into the artisan's inner life.

Like other works by Barrada, they are presented as an ode to the resilience and ingenuity of artisans (who, one suspects, the artist views as the kissing-cousins of fine art) and on the other as a tribute to the avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century, like the iconic ready-mades Marcel Duchamp.

BIOGRAPHY

Yto Barrada was born in France in 1971 and grew up in Tangier and Paris, where she studied history and political science at the Sorbonne. She continued her studies at the International Center of Photography in New York. Yto Barrada has shown her work all over the world in both museums and at film festivals, and her artworks have featured at Biennales and centres of the arts. She has won a series of prestigious prizes in recent years. Barrada was nominated this year for the 'Prix Marcel Duchamp' – an annual prize awarded to an important French artist.

Her work has been shown at venues including The Power Plant, Toronto (2016) Carré d'Art, Nîmes (2015), Centre Pompidou, Paris (2014), Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco (2012), Tate Modern, London (2011) and Haus der Kunst, Munich (2010). She took part in the 2007 and 2011 Venice Biennales. Barrada is also co-founder of the Cinémathèque in Tangier.

Yto Barrada is represented by Pace Gallery, London, Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg/Beirut and Galerie Polaris, Paris.

PUBLICATION

The book '*Guide to Fossils for Forgers and Foreigners*' has been published in parallel with the exhibition. It is a sort of sequel to her 2011 publication *Guide to Trees for Governors and Gardener*, also re-released in a new edition this year. The catalogue contains her new work and a collection of texts written and selected by the artist, on heritage and shifting definitions of authenticity, laced as always with subversive wit, subtlety and ingenuity.

Available for purchase in the M-shop as of October

500 YEARS OF UTOPIA

Tracing the Future

30.09.16 >< 20.11.16

The book *Utopia* by Thomas More was printed in Leuven 800 years ago. *Tracing the Future* brings together seven artists who translate the idea of 'utopia' in their work. In addition to Yto Barrada's exhibition, the centre of Leuven is currently showing work by Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares, the Otolith Group, Allan Sekula, Martin Le Chevallier, and Adrien Tirtiaux. Each of these artists takes a critical look at the ecological, political and social impact of the contemporary Utopia. They highlight the success, but also the failure, of the quest for an ideal world.

LIST OF WORKS

Faux Départ, 2015, Video, 22'43"

© Yto Barrada 2015. Commissioned by The Abraaj Group Art Prize, 2015.

Untitled (painted orthoceras Coca-Cola Bottles), 2015

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut; Pace Gallery, London; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Lying Stone Hearts (Fake fossil series, two scorpions and trilobite), 2015

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut; Pace Gallery, London; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Untitled (Beringer's Lying Stones), 2014-2015

C-print © Natural History Museum, London. Courtesy the artist; Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut

TBC (Dinosaur Woodblock Prints), 2013

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Pace Gallery, London; Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Salon Géologique, 2016

© Yto Barrada

Untitled (Painted educational boards found in Natural History Museum, never opened, Azilal, Morocco; fig. 1-6), 2013-2015

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Pace Gallery, London; Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Untitled (Felt circus flooring, Tangier), 2013-2015

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Pace Gallery, London; Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Untitled (Handmade carpet in collaboration with Darna's Women weaving workshop), 2011-2013

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Pace Gallery, London; Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Lyautey Unit Blocks, 2010

Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut

Untitled (Maréchal Lyautey Quotes Series), 2015

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Pace Gallery, London; Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Lorsque sur une terre lointaine on rencontre 2 anglo saxons ils ont déjà formé un trust si ce sont 2 allemands ils ont déjà formé un verein si ce sont 2 français ils sont brouillés

Untitled (North African Toys Series, Escalier du rat | The rat's staircase), 2014-2015

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Pace Gallery, London; Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Untitled (Tangier Studio Series: colour sampler, shape sampler, tectonic plate sampler, origami iris), 2012-2015

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Pace Gallery, London; Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

A Modest Proposal, 2010-2013

15 Posters, recto verso

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut; Pace Gallery, London; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Faux Guide, 2015

Posters, recto verso

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut; Pace Gallery, Londen; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Beau Geste, 2009, Video, 3'

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Pace Gallery, Londen; Sfeir-Semler Gallery Hamburg/Beirut; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

Plumber Assemblage, 2015

Mixed media

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut; Pace Gallery, Londen; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

A Guide to Trees for Governors and Gardeners, 2014, 16mm film, 4'5"

© Yto Barrada. Courtesy Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg/Beirut; Pace Gallery, Londen; Galerie Polaris, Parijs

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

OPEN

Monday > Sunday 11:00 >< 18:00

Thursday 11:00 >< 22:00

Wednesday closed

TICKETS

You can buy a discounted Utopia combo ticket (€16) *the exhibitions Yto Barrada, In Search of Utopia and EUtopia at M, the permanent collection and the Treasury of Saint Peter's, as well as a visit to the tower and the exhibition Utopia & More at the University Library.*

	Tickets reception desk	Online tickets (°)
+ 26 year	€12*	€9*
+ 26 year & concessions	€10*	€7*
13-25 year	€5	€3
0 - 12 year	free	free

*audio tour included | (°) + € 1,50 per reservation

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PRESS IMAGES

Can be downloaded from the online press room of M – Museum Leuven: <http://mleuven.prezly.com>

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